

JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

This September marks the 24th annual **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** observance, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (<http://www.samhsa.gov>), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (<http://www.hhs.gov>). This initiative raises awareness about the mental and substance use disorders that affect millions of individuals, as well as their families, and celebrates those in recovery. It also recognizes the contribution made by those who work in the behavioral health field.

This year's theme, ***"Join the Voices for Recovery: Together on Pathways to Wellness,"*** represents the many ways that people can prevent mental and substance use disorders, seek treatment, and sustain recovery as part of a commitment to living a mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy life. The theme also highlights that people are not alone on this journey to seek total health every day. Family, friends, and community members can support individuals throughout the entire recovery process.

The following narratives provide personal perspectives on the benefits of prevention, treatment, and recovery. While every story is unique, they all illustrate this year's **Recovery Month** theme by showing that there are many pathways to wellness, each with positive outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. These stories are an inspiration to take action and seek treatment for a mental and/or substance use disorder, or help a loved one in need.

"Speaking together, we can change the conversation on addiction and recovery and, in so doing, pave the way for healthier and safer individuals, families, and communities."

– Peter Gaumond

PETER GAUMOND

Chief, Recovery Branch, Office of National Drug Control Policy Washington, DC

My name is Peter, and I'm a person in long-term recovery. For me, that means it has been more than 26 years since I have had to drink or use any other substance.

When I was struggling to overcome my addiction to alcohol, I could not have imagined saying those words – to the world or even to myself.

In the latter stages of my addiction, I could not imagine living without alcohol. I was no longer able to see the meaning, purpose, and connection to others that once filled me. My passion, sense of purpose, and self-respect had been replaced by hopelessness, shame, and a sense of self-betrayal.

However, as I began to walk the path to recovery, I started to catch glimpses of a world beyond the bleak landscape of addiction – a world of renewed meaning and purpose in which I could once again find ways to contribute.

For almost 20 years, I chose not to talk publicly about my addiction and my recovery. While my family and friends knew I was in recovery, others did not. Ironically, during those two decades, I worked in the addictions field as a counselor, educator, program director, and state government official. When I finally made the decision to openly acknowledge my recovery and to share about it in public forums, a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I realized that I had been struggling internally with the same stigma and shame that I hoped to combat in the community. "Going public" as a person in recovery has allowed me to more authentically embody my passion, has given me a new tool for helping heal the individual, family, and social wounds caused by addiction, and has deepened and broadened my sense of connection to others in recovery and to the broader community.

When I share, my focus is not on "war stories" or on a specific recovery pathway, but rather on what I like to think of as universal truths about addiction and recovery, such as: *addiction is a disease of isolation; it does not discriminate, it affects people of all genders, social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds; recovery is a transformative process that has individual, family, and community dimensions; and, there are many pathways to recovery.* As more and more of us share our stories, I believe the broader community will begin to recognize that addiction is a "we" problem that must be addressed by the whole community and not a "them" problem that can simply be relegated to law enforcement or fixed by treatment and forgotten. When we speak our truth, we are heard. Speaking together, we can change the conversation on addiction and recovery and, in so doing, pave the way for healthier and safer individuals, families, and communities.



ALLEN MCQUARRIE

Chapter and Committee Chair, PRO-ACT Doylestown, PA

During my 26 years in long-term recovery, I've learned that no one in recovery got here without being coached, mentored, and assisted by peers – before, during, after, or even in the absence of formal treatment. We all have one thing in common: we were led into recovery by caring, compassionate, and competent peers who got there first, but not on their own.

As part of my long-term recovery, I have become an advocate. Advocacy is our strongest tool to change policy and be a voice for the recovery community at the local, state, and federal levels. I chair PRO-ACT (<http://www.councilsepa.org/programs/pro-act>), a well-respected, highly-visible, and vibrant grassroots organization for people affected by addiction and their family members in the greater Philadelphia, PA area.

I am also grateful to have helped my son begin and sustain 13 years in long-term recovery and my brother celebrate 10 years of sustained recovery. Peer assistance, recovery coaching, and recovery mentoring from reliable professional and recovery resources played a significant role in our recovery. We had good role models in recovery that enabled us to imitate what they did to be successful. We each had a minimum of 30 days of residential professional care followed by aftercare and regular attendance at 12-step meetings. We all found the same pathway: timely intervention, a continuum of treatment, and recovery support for some time afterwards.



“Advocacy is our strongest tool to change policy and be a voice for the recovery community at the local, state, and federal levels.”

BETH

Blogger, Be Here Today Irving, TX

My life was spinning out of control. You couldn't tell by looking at me. I had a three-bedroom house with the person I loved, a great job, and a nice car; but I was miserable.

I felt like two people: one who didn't know who I was or who I wanted to be, and the other a completely together person that I let everyone see. I spent years, including many after I sobered up, trying to find myself in other people. I placed my self-worth in the hands of others.

I drank excessively. I didn't want to feel anything, except that I was in control of my circumstances. In the most sincere moment of my life, I said to the universe, "I can't do this anymore."

When I arrived on the doorstep of recovery, I was a broken woman. My self-respect was in tatters, and my spirit was as broken as the bottles left in my wake. The most costly price was the jumbo-size crater in my soul.

In sobriety, it was as if a brand new notebook and a box of drawing pencils were laid in front of me. People told me I could draw the life of my dreams. One by one, I picked up the pencils and began to draw and write my life. It wasn't easy at first, and the life I drew then doesn't exactly resemble the life I sketch now.

I am my own, proud woman in recovery for 21 years. I care for myself and do my best to maintain my integrity with myself and others. I nurture my spiritual life and grow daily by practicing positive principles.

I am so very grateful for this precious gift of sobriety.



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CHRIS BUDNICK

Vice President of Programs, The Healing Place of Wake County Raleigh, NC

A friend of mine recently said about recovery, "There is room around the table for everyone." In the beginning, I wondered if I belonged at that table. I was 16 when I was first exposed to recovery and was just shy of my 19th birthday when I ultimately entered my recovery. In addition to addiction, I struggled with depression, thoughts of suicide, a history of cutting and burning myself, a childhood head injury, and an overwhelming sense of not belonging.

When I entered an inpatient treatment program in 1990, I was confused and scared. I did not intend, plan, or expect to still be in recovery years later. However, after I completed inpatient treatment, I found people in recovery who guided me, supported me, and encouraged me.

I am grateful for my family for intervening early and providing support and resources for me to seek help. Staying in recovery has required continued involvement with peer-based recovery supports, and at times, professional assistance.

As a result of being in recovery, I have a college education and a meaningful career. I have rediscovered lost interests and broadened my experiences, and I am blessed with the support and love of others in recovery, as well as friends and family who support and believe in recovery.

Today, I belong around the table.



***"I have rediscovered lost interests
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CURTISS KOLODNEY

Recovery Support Services Consultant Washington, DC

I am a person in long-term recovery, which for me means that I haven't used substances for more than eight years. Recovery has changed my life.

I was introduced to drugs in high school and was expelled from schools more than once. I eventually graduated from college, married, and got a job at a large managed care organization as a director in health care operations. Although I kept my addiction pretty much hidden during this time, I struggled to maintain relationships. When they fell apart, I always believed it was the other person's fault.

When I got divorced in 1999, I didn't realize that I was incapable of having any type of relationship. At that point, my addiction began to take off. I stopped going to work, and when I could no longer feed my addiction, I decided I would take my life. When I tried, I ended up calling an ambulance – and have never felt so relieved. I was finally able to say I needed help. I went to treatment and soon thereafter I relapsed. About one year later, through the help of a 12-step program, my recovery began to take hold.

I held several jobs early in my recovery, including a house manager at a treatment facility and at a recovery house, and an outreach worker. I wanted to contribute and share the gifts that I had received. In 2011, I became involved with my partner who was a former college classmate. It took my whole life to get to the relationship that I am in now. I am a real partner in the most wonderful, giving relationship I could ever dream of. I work, vote, pay taxes, and I am involved in my community. Recovery is a gift that I get to open again and again, every day. I am living proof that recovery is possible.



***"Recovery is a gift that I get to
open again and again, every day."***

DAPHNE

Freelance Writer and Homemaker Lakeland, FL

My name is Daphne, and I have bipolar disorder.

I was diagnosed in 2009, after delaying doctor visits for fear of being labeled “weak” or “crazy.” I was ashamed and in denial. Only after experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) did I take my counselor’s advice to visit a psychiatrist.

My counselor, psychiatrist, and recovery group have been God’s gifts to me.

My counselor has helped me to process my feelings – not only with PTSD, but also with mood swings that accompany bipolar disorder. She has taught me specific techniques to process life in general and to continue the process of self-reflection and personal freedom.

My psychiatrist has helped me to understand – and accept – that bipolar disorder is an illness just like any other chronic illness. It took a while to identify the medications that worked for me, but my psychiatrist never gave up on me. He listened to me, and he encouraged me. I now have an excellent medication with few side effects. When I feel an episode coming on, I use the techniques he has taught me to identify it early on and to deal with it in a healthy manner. My psychiatrist truly has given me “better living through chemistry.”

My recovery group has supported me every step of the way. They have listened to me. They have never judged me or treated me any differently. They have loved me unconditionally.

I now understand that it’s okay to get help – from family, friends, counselors, doctors, recovery groups, and yes, even medications.

I couldn’t make it a single day without God’s help. He has brought me to where I am today. He loves me just as I am – and now, I do too.



“My recovery group has supported me every step of the way. They have listened to me. They have never judged me or treated me any differently. They have loved me unconditionally.”

EMILY

**Director, Center for Addiction Recovery,
Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health,
Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, GA**



My name is Emily, and I'm in long-term recovery. I started drinking when I was 17 and I got sober shortly after my 22nd birthday. In that short time, alcohol took me into some of the darkest corners of society and into a seemingly endless depression and emptiness of spirit. I was attending a large state school at the time, and there were limited recovery resources available to students on campus or in the community. I was lost and scared, so I walked into the rooms of a 12-step fellowship where I found companionship, hope, and a solution for living that has worked for me as a way of life ever since.

I'm now 27 years old and have been in recovery for more than 5 years. In that time, I've earned my master's degree and started working toward my doctorate. I have an exuberant and delightful 2-year-old daughter, and I mentor many women in the community. I'm working in the field of public health, where I serve students (much like the scared one I once was) who are in recovery from substance use disorders. My life is so incredibly full today! I get to work with and support students who are in recovery and provide them with the resources that I wish I had access to when I was newly sober. I am eternally grateful for my life today and to share my solution with others who need it!

***"I was lost and scared, so I walked
into the rooms of a 12-step fellowship
where I found companionship, hope,
and a solution for living..."***

JAUQUESE ARMSTRONG

Edison, NJ

I have been living with a mental illness for 30 years. For 25 of those years, I was stubborn and living in delusion and psychosis. I am a living testimony that you can make it through if you have faith and, in my case, family.

I was 20 years old when I had my first psychotic episode, and not long after I became catatonic – a psychiatric state where I stopped almost all movement. There weren't very many good drugs on the market in the early 80s. I was given shock treatments and an antipsychotic and sent on my way. While adjusting to treatment, I had to change my chemical engineering major, and it took eight years for me to get a B.A. in journalism.

I worked on and off after I completed school. My family moved a lot, so I got the benefit of new psychiatrists. They found the combination of drugs that worked for me through a research project. In about a year, I was psychosis-free, and I have been managing my mental illness for more than six years. I give thanks to God and family who have always helped me along the way.

I am now in my fifth year of a workable level of recovery and wellness. I enjoy living independently. I volunteer with a mental health organization and do everything I can to combat misconceptions, including participating in a documentary, delivering inspirational speeches, and publishing articles. I am also working to publish a memoir. I hope these projects will inspire, educate, and stimulate conversation about mental health issues on a personal level. All of these activities help me to feel that my experience was not in vain. When everyone begins to understand, I am confident that the misconceptions will fade.



"I am now in my fifth year of a workable level of recovery and wellness. I enjoy living independently."

STANICE ANDERSON

**Author, Speaker, and Blogger, *The Huffington Post* and *The WOW Zone*
Washington, DC**

I am a woman blessed with the gift of long-term recovery! I am also the woman who kept dying and coming back after a heroin overdose. The dreams that my addiction stole from me were restored, my passion for life was resurrected, and my purpose redefined.

In the beginning, I doubted that I could stay clean for 24 hours. Now, one day at a time, it's been 27 years and counting. For me, the 11 keys that unlocked the door to successful, long-term, and thriving recovery are (1) surrendering – accepting that I could not stay clean on my own; (2) transparency with the people in my life; (3) joining a 12-step program, including having a sponsor; (4) seeking professional counseling that helped me get to the root causes of my addiction; (5) praying for and exercising the resulting faith; (6) utilizing the arts and creative expression that promotes healing from the inside out; (7) actively searching to discover and hone my gifts; (8) finding role models who encouraged and empowered me; (9) finding hope in listening to the stories and experiences of others; (10) forgiving myself and others, and accepting God's forgiveness. I also sought forgiveness from the people I hurt – especially my son, who I abandoned during my addiction; and (11) perseverance – through time, consistency, love, and patience, the wounds healed and my relationships with God, people, and myself flourished. Slowly, I earned the title "Moms," and my three young grandchildren lovingly call me "Hallelujah Grandma."

By God's amazing grace and the help of the people who've textured my life, I am living my resurrected dreams. As an author of several published books, including "I Say A Prayer For Me: One Woman's Life of Faith and Triumph," "Walking On Water When The Ground Ain't Enuf," and "12-Step Programs: A Resource Guide," I know that my words help change and save lives.

As a poet and performance artist, I write and perform one-woman shows about my journey. In 2012, I was appointed as SAMHSA's National Honorary Chairperson for Wellness Week. Where once I existed in the land of "nevers," now I live my dreams in the fertile land of infinite possibilities.

Hope is contagious! My passionate purpose is to spread it – one day at a time.



"In the beginning, I doubted that I could stay clean for 24 hours. Now, one day at a time, it's been 27 years and counting."

VICTORIA COSTELLO

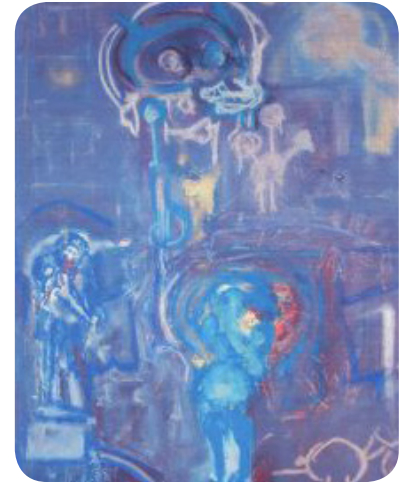
**Author and Mental Health Advocate,
Mental Health Mom Blog
San Francisco, CA**

At age 17, my son Alex lost his ability to finish a whole sentence, get a night's sleep, or face the other kids at school. The doctors who examined him at UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute told me he should stay for a month so they could make a proper diagnosis and stabilize what they called his "psychotic symptoms."

Having raised two athletic sons, I'd been in an emergency room with each of them more than once, but I can't imagine any two words coming from the mouth of a doctor putting more terror into the heart of a mother than "psychotic symptoms." But what I was about to learn would open my eyes to much more.

From a simple family mental health history interview, I learned a lot. For the first time, I considered that a grandfather I'd never met, whose early death on a railroad track had always been called an accident, could have taken his own life. Or that the heavy drinking of several family members was probably an attempt to self-medicate severe depression, perhaps even bipolar disorder in the cases of my grandfather and sister. Within six months of that interview, I also began treatment for my own life-long depression.

After nearly losing my son to an illness, I've come to believe that those of us who survive such a family history have a special responsibility to break this wall of silence. After three years spent in psychotherapy and taking a brief course of antipsychotic medication, Alex was able to return to school and complete his education at a prestigious art college. Today he's working and living a full life – as is his mother.



Alex's self portrait.

***"...what I was about to learn would
open my eyes to much more."***

DR. ALMUSTAPHAEL AL-KAHLIL-BEY

L.P.C., M.S.W., M.A.C., I.C.A.D.C.

Director, Gospel Rescue Ministries Recovery Services Program Washington, DC



I was born in Baltimore, MD, a descendent of a Caribbean sharecropper and a Native American. Today, I'm a person in long-term recovery for 25 years. Growing up, my addiction led to a life on the streets and a continuous downward spiral of violating my own principles. I was a convicted felon and fugitive in two different states, and I had nothing to show for my life except my children. I realized that if I did not change my lifestyle, I would lose them too. I wanted to be a good father – but at best I was an absentee father.

When I finally accepted help, I realized that I was not a bad person – I was a sick person who needed help. I went into treatment, which was my springboard into a new way of life. I joined a 12-step group, which was a catalyst in my relationship with God. I started living instead of just surviving. I completed my bachelor's degree and was on the Dean's list, earned a master's degree in social work, and started my doctoral studies.

Today, I am a productive member of society, working at Gospel Rescue Ministries Recovery Services Program and serving as the Mid-Atlantic representative of the Association of Christian Alcohol Drug Addiction Counselors. I am also the credentialing and education chair for the Maryland International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC) Board and an Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC)-approved educational provider.

My life is a practice of gratitude. I am involved in a system that produces qualified committed counselors who demonstrate personal and professional integrity. I thank God for my recovery.

***"When I finally accepted help,
I realized that I was not a bad person
– I was a sick person who needed help."***

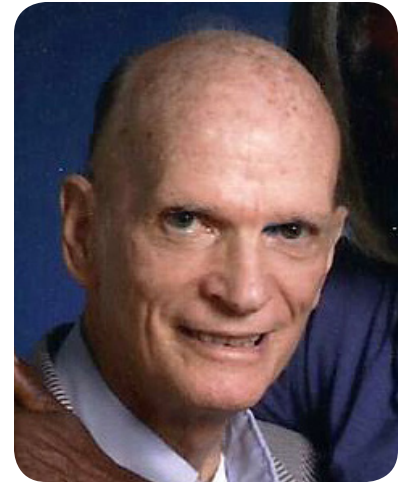
DAN O'LAUGHLIN

Recovery Africa Washington, DC and Accra, Ghana

I am a person in recovery from alcoholism who has not had a drink in just more than 10 years. I drank for many years in high school, college, the Army, and the U.S. Peace Corps, and then for more than 30 years in many countries around Africa. In my mind, I was not an alcoholic, but someone whose work required a lot of drinking time. I did not consider myself an alcoholic because I worked hard, ran a marathon in Botswana at age 50, was charitable, and went to church regularly.

However, as I got older, life became a burden due to the headaches, hangovers, and anger. I seldom went a day without drinking. When I could no longer control my drinking, I finally stopped and found a new way of living. My response was to go into a 12-step meeting to figure out how to get back to the good old days. My wife and daughter have been important partners on my recovery journey.

These past 10 years have been filled with an exciting life of helping to carry the message of recovery to Ghana, and networking with organizations across the United States, such as Faces & Voices of Recovery, Oxford House, Inc., universities, rehab facilities, and others. Working with a growing group of supporters, we've been able to open two Oxford Houses in Ghana, organized 10 different 12-step meetings, and opened the House of St. Francis as a rehab facility on August 1, 2012. Recovery has given me these fun, unique, and exciting opportunities.



"When I could no longer control my drinking, I finally stopped and found a new way of living."

KAREN

Washington, DC

My freedom from the bondage of more than 20 years of drug use began with my arrest in April 2004. I was tired of using drugs, but I didn't know how to stop. Addiction not only cost me my freedom, but also the custody of my daughter. This arrest pointed me in the direction of the DC Superior Court's Family Treatment Court program, which gave me the opportunity to save my life and regain the custody of my little girl. I entered the program in April 2005, when I admitted that I was powerless over my addiction, and my life had become unmanageable.

While in treatment, I realized I didn't have to put myself or my daughter through the pain and humiliation of my disease ever again if I just didn't use drugs. During my 21 months in the Family Treatment Court program, I learned how to really live on life's terms and made the commitment to never use narcotics again. I'm not going to say it's not a daily struggle, but like any other health condition – diabetes, heart disease, obesity – life changes are required in order to thrive.

Stopping drug use is the beginning, but staying off is daily work. Recovery has become my most prized possession. I've gained control over this area of my life through 12-step meetings and a sponsor. I fight the disease of addiction one day at a time.

Today, I love my life, and I am grateful for the challenges that have come my way. Successfully overcoming these obstacles has made me so much stronger and has given me confirmation that I can, and will, be able to deal with anything that comes my way without the use of drugs. My daughter and I have a bond that I can only describe as a grace from God. I wish more people facing a substance use disorder could experience the joy and gratitude that I feel when I wake up in the morning in my right mind, in recovery.



“I learned how to really live on life's terms and made the commitment to never use narcotics again.”

KEVIN HINES

Speaker and Author Walnut Creek, CA

As a young man with bipolar disorder, I heard voices in my head, suffered severe mood swings, and sunk into a deep depression. As a way out of the pain, I attempted suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. Immediately after jumping and letting go of the rail, I instantly regretted the decision, and tried to position myself in a way that the impact of the water would not immediately kill me. Though I suffered extensive injuries, I survived the jump and now use my experience to help people carry on through their depression and remain positive as they manage their disease.

I have spoken to more than 300,000 people internationally on "living mentally well," my firsthand experience with suicidal thoughts, and the struggles of living with a mental illness. I have been featured in the critically acclaimed film "The Bridge," and on "Larry King Live," "20/20," "Anderson Cooper 360," "Good Morning America," and Ireland's famed "Tonight." I have written several articles about mental health and the prevention of suicide in America and recently finished my memoir, "Coming Apart – Not Broken, The Kevin Hines Story."

My will to live and stay mentally well is supported by my regular participation in cognitive behavioral therapy, a routine sleep cycle, regular physical exercise, and a healthy diet. I refrain from using drugs and alcohol. I also take my medication with 100-percent accuracy.

I hope that my will to live and stay mentally well inspires people to change their lives for the better.



"My will to live and stay mentally well is supported by my regular participation in cognitive behavioral therapy, a routine sleep cycle, regular physical exercise, and a healthy diet."

LISA E. OVERTON

Board Member, A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing) Spring Valley, CA

The most challenging part about being a veteran in recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a substance use disorder is that I don't look like your typical "Disabled Veteran." I have all my limbs and no battle scars. My wounds are internal. But people notice my behavior: I shy away from them. I get anxious in crowds. Loud noises make me jump. I don't attend parties or go out to clubs.

Once they get to know me though, people see the strengths I've used in my recovery, including courage, compassion, honesty, sincerity, loyalty, faith in a higher power, a sense of humor, and the ability to ask for help when I need it and to give help as well. These strengths have supported my recovery in many ways, including learning how to advocate for myself and others.

I am fortunate in that I was able to receive both inpatient and outpatient addiction treatment. Those treatment centers directed me to 12-step recovery, which helped me learn where my thinking needed re-adjusting. I follow the 12 steps, attend meetings on a regular basis, and my higher power steered me to my current sponsor who demonstrates unconditional love.

If I am hurting, I have learned it is okay to find a friend I trust and let them know what I am going through. It is okay to be me. Loyalty to my friends and my recovery keeps me grounded. Being honest and sincere lets people know who I am and that they can trust me too. A sense of humor allows me to laugh at my shortcomings and not take myself so seriously. My faith in my higher power has given me the ability to let go of trying to control everything. This gives me a sense of belonging and a serenity that was unknown to me before. For this I am grateful.

"If I am hurting, I have learned it is okay to find a friend I trust and let them know what I am going through."

JACK McQUEEN

Addiction Professionals Greenlawn, NY

My experience with alcohol started at 17 when I shared a quart of vodka with my best friend. We consumed it in less than a half hour, an episode when perhaps the seeds of alcoholic drinking were sown. When I entered military college, I quickly fell in with an experimental group of cadets. There were warning signs that there was danger ahead, but my blinders were still on. When I got married, drinking was for the most part social. It was not until I hit a single life again after my divorce that my drinking and drug use went into high gear.

For about 5 years I became a running fanatic, and I can recall some friends asking me what I was running away from. I often scoffed at them, telling myself they just had no clue. However, it was me who had no clue. I went from a chubby 214 pounds to a borderline anorexic at 138 pounds. At age 30, a new group of friends introduced me to cocaine and the downward spiral was in full speed.

After some time, I stopped using cocaine, but my drinking began to escalate. I essentially replaced one drug for another. Drugs and alcohol ruined me financially, physically, and spiritually. My reputation went from a man admired for his brain and running prowess to someone that people joked about behind my back. I never gave my employers my best even though I did not get fired in any of the many positions I held. My alcoholism never brought me to rehab or a DWI, although this may not have been the case had I continued down this path. My tenure in [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](http://www.aa.org) (<http://www.aa.org>) began on August 28, 1989, a date that will live in my own infamy. Fortunately for me, I have not had a relapse. I know that I have been blessed to remain sober to this day more than 23 years later.

To coin an old phrase – my life has changed in oh so many ways. I never wake up with a hangover or remember what I might have said the night before that might have been misguided. At the end of most days, I can lay my head down and fall asleep knowing that I have given the world my best effort. In sobriety, I was able to earn a second college degree in psychology, and I am currently enrolled as a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) in training and hope to finish that certificate by the middle of 2013. My intention is to become an alcohol and substance abuse counselor because I know that my experience can be a wonderful way for me to give back to the sober life I now live.



“At the end of most days, I can lay my head down and fall asleep knowing that I have given the world my best effort.”